

University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 2011

Review of *Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet: An Impressionist at Glacier National Park* by William E. Farr

Alexandra Ganser
Friedrich-Alexander Universitat Erlangen-Nurnberg

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Ganser, Alexandra, "Review of *Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet: An Impressionist at Glacier National Park* by William E. Farr" (2011). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2675.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2675>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet: An Impressionist at Glacier National Park. By William E. Farr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. xi + 259 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.

The turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century saw the conclusion of the Great Northern Railway (1893) and the birth of Glacier National Park in Montana (1910), two events so tightly interrelated through the family of railroad tycoon James J. Hill and his son Louis W. Hill that they would come to be automatically associated in the minds of many twentieth-century Americans—especially the prospective middle-class tourists from the metropolitan East who were following the Hills' promotional exhortation to "See America First" and experience a tamed version of western wilderness at Glacier Park: outdoor adventure and close contact with what was deemed the remnant of a prior era, the Indian included. In the course of these campaigns, Louis Hill engaged a number of visual artists—painters, graphic artists, photographers, and filmmakers—to create lasting and iconic images to be associated with the Park.

Among them were many German and Austrian artists, whose excellence in landscape painting was well known. Only second in fame after modernist Winold Reiss was Julius Seyler, a successful late impressionist and early expressionist painter from Munich, who spent the summers of 1913 and 1914 in Montana. With

this brilliant artistic biography, William E. Farr is the first to present an extensive study of Seyler's involvement in these efforts and of his work at large, although his focus is clearly on Seyler's years in America and his artistic experiments with the Plains and Rockies landscape and the Blackfeet of Montana, experiments that challenged well-established visual regimes of representing the "vanishing American" on both sides of the Atlantic. The amount of research conducted for this richly illustrated and elegantly written book, from interviews with descendants to the consultation of various archives, museums, and private collections, is impressive and the depth of analysis illuminating. Farr presents three interwoven and well-balanced histories: that of the painter Seyler and his stylistic development owing to his confrontation with the western landscape and real—rather than boyhood fantasy—"Indians"; that of Glacier National Park and turn-of-the-century "scenic nationalism"; and that of the "Blackfoot," or what Farr, more accurately, calls the "Glacier Park Indians": those members of the Piegan tribe of Montana and the Northern Plains that, lacking other options, cooperated with and worked for the Great Northern and Glacier Park without relinquishing their cultural pride and agency. These three histories are inextricably linked, and it is Farr's merit to tell them meticulously and with much critical insight.

The book can be highly recommended for anyone interested in the history of the American West and its visual culture in general and in the fascinating consequences of transatlantic, western, and Native American cultural contact in particular, never forgetting to take into account the unequal power relations framing that contact.

ALEXANDRA GANSER

Department for English and American Studies
Friedrich-Alexander-University
Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany